DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 035 CS 205 748

AUTHOR Adelson, Rachel K.
TITLE Completeness of Mental Illness Coverage in Six Mass-Audience Women's Magazines: A Content Analysis.
PUB DATE Aug 80
NOTE 21p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (63rd, Boston, MA, August 9-13, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Content Analysis: *Journalism: *Media Research: *Mental Disorders: *News Reporting: *Periodicals
IDENTIFIERS *Womens Magazines

ABSTRACT

A content analysis was performed on six mass-audience women's magazines to determine frequency of coverage of specific mental disorders and to see how fair and complete mental illness coverage was in the magazines. The six magazines analyzed were "Family Circle," "McCalls," "Good Housekeeping," "Cosmopolitan," "Glamour," and "Seventeen." The contents of 108 articles appearing between 1975 and 1979 were classified by an adapted psychiatric taxonomy and then compared to the actual clinical picture of mental illness. A significant difference was found between percentages of specific mental illnesses covered in the sample and that occurring in two clinical populations. In addition, significantly more articles dealing with milder disorders were found than would be warranted by their existence in the clinical population. The findings suggest that the magazines studied gave a somewhat inaccurate picture of the frequencies with which mental disorders actually occur and that they paid little attention to such severe disorders as mental retardation and psychosis. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Magazine Division

ED191035

COMPLETENESS OF MENTAL ILLNESS COVERAGE IN SIX MASS-AUDIENCE WOMEN'S MAGAZINES: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

by
Rachel K. Adelson
M.A. Candidate
Department of Journalism
University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas 78712
(512) 471-5933

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Rachel K. Adelson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented to the Magazine Division, Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Boston, Massachusetts, August, 1980.

CS205748

I. INTRODUCTION

Whether the media determine the direction and intensity of attitudes toward mental illness, set an agenda for what is important to think about within the field of mental illness (Shaw and McCombs, 1977), or perform some mixture of the two, their coverage of the subject is important. If some disorders are covered more frequently than others, ignorance about the less-emphasized disorders will be among the consequences (Report to the President from The President's Commission on Mental Health, 1978). If media coverage sets an agenda that places certain disorders lower than others, policy-makers and funding sources may act accordingly.

This study analyzed the recent mental illness article content of six mass-audience women's magazines and classified that content according to the frequency of specific disorders. Results were compared to the actual clinical picture of mental illness to see how fair and complete mental illness coverage is in these magazines.

If the two populations matched, we could infer that coverage was fair in that editors were presenting readers with an accurate picture of the clinical reality. If significant differences were found between the two samples, various inferences could be drawn about the fairness, breadth and depth of coverage by magazines on the subject.

Analysis of mental illness article content is important in order to see if the "textbook" presented by the magazines in their body of educational articles may be missing a few chapters. An accurate and responsible presentation of mental illness, one which promotes acceptance and understanding of the full range of disorders

(Swain, 1968), can affect us on individual, community, bureaucratic and societal levels.

Magazines were studied as potent indicators of mass media mental illness coverage. General-interest magazines have more latitude than news media in the subjects they select and so, "...more than the daily press, mirror the mood, the mores, and the faddish tastes of society" (Barret, 1974, p.25).

Besides reflecting society's interests, magazines also serve as an educational medium:

> The value of the mass magazine as a medium for mental health information is unquestioned, if only because of its huge circulation and readership. In addition to its attractiveness, easy availability to the reader, relative permanence, and its wide social influence because of America's respect for its 'favorite' magazines, makes the mass magazine ideal for the purpose (Kent, 1962, p.521).

Women's mass-circulation magazines were studied because they have a far higher level of psychology and self-improvement content than either men's or other general and news magazines (Hall's Magazine Editorial Reports, 1977). They have defined themselves as service-oriented (Magazine Profiles, 1974). And among the how-to articles on cooking and gardening are self-help features. These often deliberately focus on emotional issues, interpersonal relationships, and problems arising from these. Society permits women to explore the nature of their feelings and allows them to admit weakness and trouble, and magazines reflect this.

Articles in the study were "diagnosed" by the same classification scheme, with modifications, that most psychiatrists (and many psychologists) use (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 2nd ed., 1968). The unit of analysis was the single article, with article content of a mental illness article describing,

defining or pertaining to the disorders in the classification scheme. Percentages of disorders appearing in 18 issues each of six women's magazines with circulation over one million were obtained and compared to percentages of disorders found by mental health professionals in their clinical population.

II. RELATED STUDIES

Taylor (1957) analyzed the attitudinal content of mental disorder articles in newspapers, magazines, radio and television broadcasts. His research, he says, concentrated more on developing methodology than assessing content. Yet his study of content proved fruitful while his method has apparently not been picked up on.

In Taylor's sample, the media most often said that the mentally abnormal do "look and act" differently from normal. This may be a trivial achievement--the essence of mental and emotional problems is that they cause people to act (though not as often look) differently than they otherwise would. In addition, by forcing opinions into a normal/abnormal framework, Taylor may have lost the shades of grey constituting most of the mental illness continuum.

Psychotics in Taylor's sample were represented as more dangerous and less clean, among other things, than neurotics. These are clinical inaccuracies, and important if readers form their attitudes toward psychosis based on the information presented in magazines.

Taylor's factor analytic approach (180 statements of mental health opinion produced 32,220 phi correlation coefficients, which were subjected to factor analysis for common dimensions) is a useful one for dealing with the complicated attitudes expressed by the media. Further study should expand upon his findings.

Kent (1962) used a different approach to determine educational value in mental health coverage by six magazines (Ladies Home Journal and McCalls among them). Tone, orientation, values, accuracy, and language use were assessed. In addition, articles were classed as essay, personal experience, explanatory, how-to, argumentative, discussion and confessions (with overlap among these types common).

Kent combined all criteria to arrive at a measure of total effect since, "Because of the ambiguities inherent in the subject material, conflicting theories of experts, frequent subjective presentation, the emotional element and mixtures of facts and opinions, the effect was often regarded to be of more importance than the material itself (Kent, 1962, p.519)."

The problems of ambiguity are considerable, but the determination and use of "total effect" may be a major flaw in the study. How was that number or rating arrived at? Does it refer to a general audience-side predicted effect or to effect on an individual rater?

In either case, is a leap from content presented to effect induced ever justified? No readership surveys or other indicators of attitude change are mentioned, and there seem to be no mediating variables measured. Without these, it is difficult to rely upon that estimated "total effect", no matter how many content variables went into it.

Wallis (1970) performed a content analysis of the pictorial coverage of the mentally ill in three national mass magazines, from 1950 to 1967, as a "reference for journalists charged with the responsibility of communicating concepts about mental illness (Wallis, 1970p.205).

Wallis discovered, like Taylor (1957), that a significant number of the mentally ill were thought of as dangerous, withdrawn

and unpredictable, yet with good chances of recovery. Wallis's study is an interesting off-shoot of the content analysis approach, but the author holds that in magazines (despite their attractiveness), a thousand words may speak more than a single picture.

Given the myriad possibilities suggested by the few past studies and the current interest in preventive and community psychology, it is hoped that further work will be done to develop a more comprehensive picture of how the media cover mental illness.

III. HYPOTHESES

This study investigated whether or not the mental illness disorder frequency count of a sample population of magazines matched the frequencies of disorders found in the clinical population.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): there will be a significant difference between percentages of specific mental illnesses in the sample of articles and the actual clinical population.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): there will be a significant difference between frequencies of articles on psychoses and mental retardation, and the milder neurotic, personality and social disorders (which include most of the disorders of childhood and adolescence), and that this difference will favor milder disorders in the magazine sample.

IV. METHOD

A content analysis was performed on six mass-audience women's magazines for frequency of coverage of specific mental disorders. The unit of analysis was the single article.

Sample

Six general-interest women's magazines were purposely selected for their appeal to various age and occupational groups (teen-ager,

homemaker, working woman) and their circulation, all above one million. Three of the magazines are among the top 10 magazines in the United States in circulation. Family Circle had the highest circulation, over eight million (Sterling and Haight, 1978).

The magazines were Family Circle, McCalls, Good Housekeeping, Cosmopolitan, Glamour and Seventeen, in order of circulation. They are read by between seven percent and 23 percent (nearly one in four) of the U.S. female population. Of these, three of the magazines (Family Circle, Good Housekeeping and McCalls) reach over 20 percent of the women in the country (Sterling and Haight, 1978).

Circulation as percentage of female population and number of female readers per copy were considered along with total circulation in selecting the sample.

Eighteen issues of each magazine (one and one-half years) for the period between 1975 and 1979 were analyzed. The latitude was allowed due to availability problems with these popular magazines, which disappear from library shelves with some regularity and made no exception for the researcher. When possible, sample issues as close to December 1979 were studied and researcher worked backward from that point.

Operational Definitions

Mental illness was defined for this study, as suggested by Taylor (1957), as consisting of psychoses, neurotic and personality disorders, social disorders, disorders of childhood and adolescence, and mental retardation.

These terms were mainly drawn from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders II (American Psychiatric Association, 1968). Further refinements were drawn from Mental Disorders (World Health Organization, 1978) and from Prescriptive

Psychotherapies (Goldstein and Stein, 1976). The Language of Mental Health (Fann and Goshen, 1977) was also helpful in providing clear and concise definitions of terms.

Condensations were made because of the study's application to the grosser distinctions found in media coverage than are useful for clinical diagnosis. Psychoses, organic disorders and mental retardation subdivisions were collapsed into broad categories; they were later further reduced when instances of some of these were scarce or nonexistent. For coding, neuroses and personality disorders were not reduced to the same extent. For purposes of comparison to clinical data, which was not broken down in precisely the same way, disorders were termed psychoses, neuroses (including personality and other mild disorders), and other (social disorders, mental retardation, and disorders of childhood and adolescence).

The classification scheme used in coding is presented in Appendix 1.

Procedure

The sample of 108 magazines was first examined for mental illness articles. Coder (author was chief coder) was supplied with explicit and detailed definitions of the mental disorders. Examples of what would or would not constitute an article on mental illness were also provided.

Coder then examined each article for nature and severity of disorder, and classified it according to the definitions provided. Data were then analyzed for frequency of disorders. Statistical operations were then performed to determine the strength of each hypothesis, and check for any significant differences predicted by them.

Magazine disorder frequencies were compared to two clinical

sample frequencies, for several reasons. First, epidemiological difficulties within psychiatry make it difficult to arrive at standard data on frequency disorders in this country. Not all individuals with mental health problems come to the attention of mental health workers; studies do not incorporate data for all the varied facilities now available. In addition, psychiatrists differ on the diagnostic reliability of the DSM II itself.

Second, using two different samples provided a double-check of the hypotheses and provided more solid ground for meaningful interpretation of the results.

The two samples used show disorder frequency for all psychiatric patients (where 90 percent are seen in a psychiatrist's private office) and for psychiatric patients admitted to mental hospitals on an inpatient basis, a more disturbed population (Marmor, Scheidemandel and Kanno, 1975, p.41, 48, 61). Of the several epidemiological studies found in the psychiatric literature, this was the most recent, most nationally representative, and closest to the classification scheme used by the researcher. The study involved 4,347 individuals.

Two reliability checks were performed on a subsample of 25 magazines chosen with the help of a random numbers table. For inter-coder reliability, a second coder was provided with detailed instruction sheets and definitions of the various disorders, plus verbal and written instructions on how to deal with the more ambiguous problems of "differnential diagnosis". Reliability coder and primary coder (researcher) coded the subsample during the same time period (three days) in the study.

Intra-coder reliability was assessed by the primary coder's returning to the subsample of 25 magazines already coded at the

end of the study (one week later) and coding for disorders. This was to see how ell the scheme held up under changing conditions and over time.

As the disorder definitions were based on decades of clinical experience (strongly on observable behaviors in some cases; with well-established differentiating factors in others, but not all), the determination of the validity of the classification scheme was not a major concern in this study. When a magazine article was coded as dealing with phobia, for example, we were fairly certain that the content discussed defined and described phobia as it is seen by mental health professionals.

N. RESULTS

Reliability results will be reported first so they can be borne in mind when the frequency analyses are reviewed.

Of the 25-magazine subsample, primary coder (Coder A) found 29 articles dealing with mental illness while reliability coder (Coder B) found 17 articles. The agreement for total number of articles was 58.6 percent, a low figure showing a near-chance level of reliability.

However, a chi square performed on percentages of specific disorders within the total found by each coder showed that the differences could be due to random fluctuation alone ($x^2=3.74$, $p<.20$, $df=4$).

Also, closer inspection for how each disorder in the neurotic and personality disorder section was represented turned up some interesting findings. 80 percent inter-rater agreement, an acceptable figure, as found for the substance abuse category, a highly specific

ons. 71 percent agreement, less substantial but still good for this reliability check, was found for the classical neurotic and personality disorders (also fairly narrowly defined disorders such as phobia, obsession-compulsion and anti-social personality). The lowest percentage of agreement was found for transient situational disturbances (29 percent), by far the most vaguely defined term in the study. (Coder B also admitted later that he overlooked this category for a while.) In addition, reliability percentages for categories where only one or two articles were found by coders were disregarded as too low to provide responsible estimates of reliability.

Intra-coder reliability proved more successful, with agreement of 93.5 percent. 29 articles were found in the first review of the sample and 31 were found in the second review.

Percentages of disorders found in the three samples (magazine, psychiatric clients, and hospital admissions) showed differences that came across clearly when presented in graphic form.

Figure 1 about here

The fewest instances were of organically-based psychoses and mental retardation. The schizophrenic and affective psychoses were also infrequently covered.

The first hypothesis, of a significant difference between percentages of specific mental illnesses in the sample of articles and in the actual clinical population, was upheld at $p<.05$ for psychiatric clients and at $p<.01$ for hospital admissions. In all

Figure 2, 3, 4 about here

the results, the greater significance of chi squares involving the hospital admissions figures are due to the more seriously disturbed nature of the hospitalized population.

Hypothesis 2, predicting significantly more articles on the milder disorders than the clinical population shows, was upheld at $p < .005$ for one-tailed tests. Again, the effect

Figures 5, 6 about here

shows more strongly for the hospitalized group than the client group.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The magazines studied did not give a completely accurate picture of the frequencies with which mental disorders appear. The only disorders they covered in proportion to the actual clinical picture were the milder neuroses, and this was only in comparison with a sample of psychiatrists' patients, troubled individuals who are seen mostly in private offices, not institutional settings. They are usually less severely disturbed than those requiring hospitalization, and their complaints have been popularized over the last decade or so as psychotherapy came into vogue. Shame about having emotional and mental problems lessened. This change in attitude may have carried over to the kinds of editorial decisions made in magazines, and could account for the lack of significant difference between the magazine neurosis sample and the psychiatric client sample. For the many magazine readers with only mild difficulties, in a world where it's increasingly common to consult a psychiatrist, magazine coverage as represented by the sample is relevant and "complete enough".

However, that phrase is in quotes because those readers may not be the only ones editors should be concerned with. Whether due to editorial bias or popular demand (or, lack of it), the more severe mental and emotional disorders such as schizophrenia, manic-

depression and mental retardation were rarely discussed in the sample. There is a large discrepancy between the magazine coverage and amount of psychosis in both clinical samples, and it is here that the chance for misunderstanding and ignorance is greatest.

As predicted, magazines also focused their attention on the milder disorders when categories were slightly regrouped along a severity dimension. Hence, reader attention would be more focused in these magazines on the milder mental disorders, an imbalanced representation of the clinical picture, especially for psychiatric hospital admissions. Again, the sample was more accurate, although not significantly so, for the group of psychiatrist's clients.

On the other hand, editors may feel that from a service-oriented point of view, not a didactic one, they can offer little help for those with more profound disturbances, while how-to-cope articles for milder and transient problems may be most beneficial to readers who needn't seek professional help.

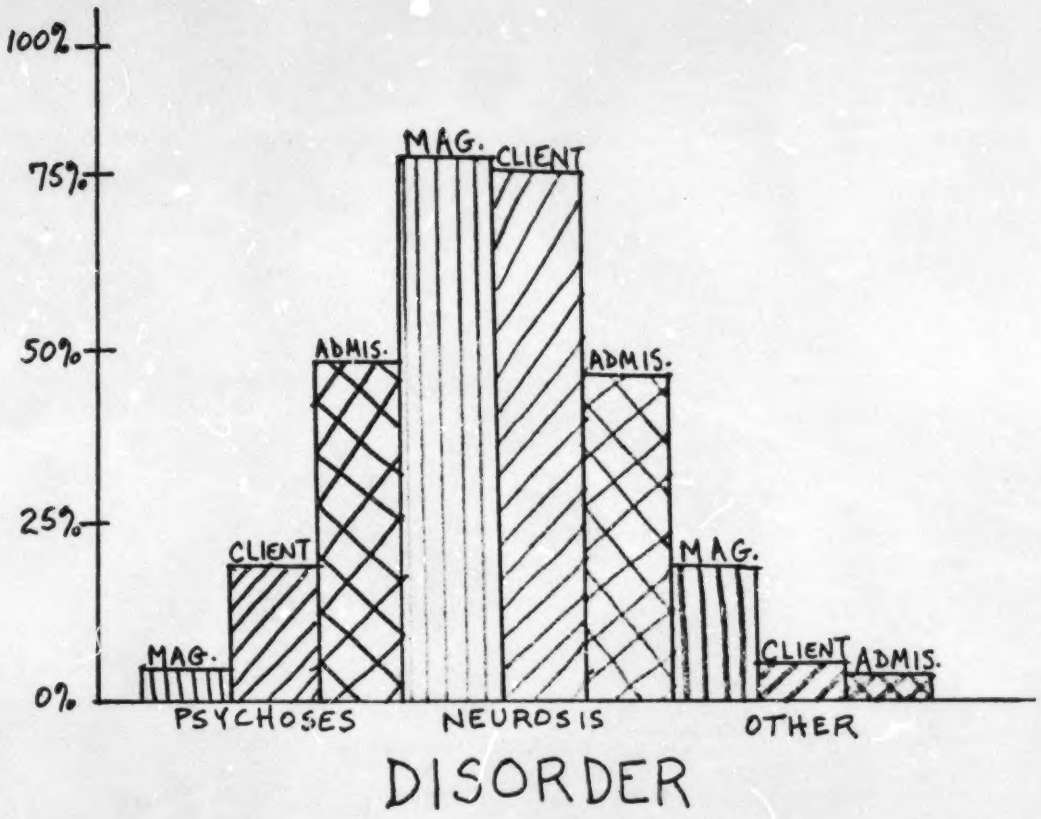
This study aimed to answer one question basic to journalism: is coverage fair? Is it representative and balanced? In the case of mental illness, the answer appears to be mostly not. Yet due to the difficulties involved in studying such coverage, this conclusion is a qualfied one.

First, a greater sample size for each magazine would have to be studied to provide more conclusive results for how individual magazines cover mental disorders.

Then, although one highly specific measure--frequency count--was used to stave off problems with ambiguity and inapplicability, definitional problems remained and were reflected in the reliability study. The development of the classification scheme used must therefore be regarded as experimental; it needs further refinement

in order to increase reliability and ease the tedious coding process.

Once the problems of definition are solved, a highly workable proposition, the classification scheme used in this study could yield easily coded, easily manipulated data. Such data could be compared to outside measures, such as clinical populations (as here), or compiled over time for historical research, or across media for comparative studies. As proven by the results yielded by the small sample surveyed in this study, it is a useful and potentially powerful tool for assessing media coverage of mental illness. Further study should be done to fulfill the promise of such analysis.



Percentage of Mental Disorders in Three Samples by Type of Disorder

FIGURE 1.

	Magazines	Clients	Admission
Psychoses	4	19	49
Neuroses	77	76	48
Other	19	5	3

Percentages of Disorders Appearing in Magazine Sample, Psychiatrists' Clients Sample, & Hospital Admissions Sample

FIGURE 2.

	Magazines	Clients
Psychoses	4	19
Neuroses	77	76
Other	19	5

$\chi^2 = 6.37, p < .05$ df = 2
2-tailed

FIGURE 3.

	Magazines	Admissions
Psychoses	4	49
Neuroses	77	48
Other	19	3

$\chi^2 = 56.56, p < .01$ df = 2
2-tailed

FIGURE 4.

	Magazines	Clients
Mild	95	81
Severe	5	19

$\chi^2 = 9.28, p < .005$
df = 1 1-tailed

FIGURE 5-

	Magazines	Admissions
Mild	95	51
Severe	5	49

$\chi^2 = 49.11, p < .005$
df = 1 1-tailed

FIGURE 6.

APPENDIX 1

MENTAL ILLNESS CLASSIFICATION SCHEME

1.0 Psychoses
- 1.1 schizophrenia
- 1.2 affective psychosis
- 1.3 organically-based psychosis
- 1.4 other psychosis

2.0 Neurotic and Personality Disorders
- 2.1 classical neurotic and personality disorders
- 2.2 sexual deviations, disorders and other problems
- 2.3 substance abuse
- 2.4 physiological malfunction
- 2.5 special symptoms
- 2.6 transient situational disturbance
- 2.7 non-psychotic from organic brain dysfunction

3.0 Social Disorders

4.0 Disorders of Childhood and Adolescence

5.0 Mental Retardation
- 5.1 mild-moderate, IQ 35-70
- 5.2 severe-profound, IQ less than 34

REFERENCES

Askenasy, Alexander, Attitudes Toward Mental Patients, A Study Across Cultures (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton and Company, 1974).

Barrett, Edward W., "Sex, Death and Other Trends in Magazines," Columbia Journalism Review, July/August 1974:24-26.

Beasley, Maurine and Silver, Sheila, Women in Media: A Documentary Sourcebook (Washington D.C.: Women's Institute for Freedom Press, 1977).

Clausen, J.A., "Public Awareness and Perception of Problems of Mental Health," Public Opinion Quarterly, 21:418-421 (1957).

Dennis, Everette E. and Rush, Ramona R., "Media Coverage of Children and Childhood: Calculated Indifference or Neglect?" Journalism Quarterly, 53:47-53 (Spring 1976).

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 2nd ed., (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1968).

Elinson, Jack, Elena Padilla and Marvin E. Perkins, Public Image of Mental Health Services. Report of a Joint Project of the Columbia University School of Public Health and Administrative Medicine and the New York City Community Mental Health Board (New York: Mental Health Materials Centers, Inc., 1967).

Ellison, Jerome and Franklin T. Gosser, "Non-fiction Magazine Articles: A Content Analysis Study," Journalism Quarterly, 36:27-34 (Winter 1959).

Fann, William E. and Charles E. Goshen., The Language of Mental Health, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: The C.V. Mosby Company, 1977).

Freedman, Alfred M., Harold I. Kaplan and Benjamin J. Sadock, eds., Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry II (Baltimore: The Williams and Wilkins Company, 1975).

Goldstein, Arnold P. and Norman Stein, Prescriptive Psychotherapies (New York: Pergamon Press, Inc., 1976).

Gross, Martin L., The Psychological Society (New York: Random House, 1978).

Hall's Magazine Editorial Reports. An Analysis of the Editorial Content of Consumer Magazines (Greenwich, Connecticut: The Russell Hall Company, A Division of Computer Output Systems, Inc., 1977).

Kant, Ruth K., "Mental Health Coverage in Six Mass Magazines," Journalism Quarterly 39:519-521 (Autumn 1962).

Magid, Nora, "The Heart, The Mind, The Pickled Okra: Women's Magazines in the Sixties," North American Review, Winter 1970. In Women in Media: A Documentary Sourcebook, op.cit., 93-97.

Magazine Profiles: Studies of a Dozen Contemporary Magazine Groupings, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Medill School of Journalism, 1974).

Marmor, Judd, Patricia L. Scheidemandel, and Charles K. Kanno, Psychiatrists and Their Patients. A National Study of Private Office Practice. (Washington, D.C.: The American Psychiatric Association and the National Association for Mental Health, 1975).

Mental Disorders: Glossary and Guide to their Classification in Accordance with the Ninth Revision of the International Classification of Diseases. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1978).

Mookerji, Rita, "A Content Analysis of Five Selected Women's Magazines in the Last Twenty Years," Master's Thesis, University of Georiga, 1967.

Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth, "Mass Communication Media and Public Opinion, Journalism Quarterly 36:401-409 (Fall, 1959).

Report to the President from The President's Commission on Mental Health, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978).

Schmeling, David G. and Edward C. Wotring, "Agenda-Setting Effects of Drug Abuse Public Service Ads," Journalism Quarterly 53:743-746. (Winter 1976).

Shaw, Donald L. and Maxwell E. McCombs, The Emergence of American Political Issues: The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Company, 1977).

Sterling, Christopher H. and Timothy R. Haight, The Mass Media: Aspen Institute Guide to Communication Industry Trends (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978).

Swain, Helen L., Attitudes Toward Mental Illness: A Review of the Literature (Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Rehabilitation Counselor Education Program, 1968).

Taylor, Wilson L., "Gauging the Mental Health Content of the Mass Media," Journalism Quarterly 34:191-201 (Spring 1957).

Wallis, Lyndell Dale, "A Content Analysis of the Pictorial Coverage of the Mentally Ill in Three National Mass Magazines," Master's Thesis, Kansas State University, 1970.

Wollberg, Lewis R., The Technique of Psychotherapy, 2nd. ed., Part Two (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1967).